

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6494

As of January 22, 2008

Title: An act relating to using multiple measures to meet high school graduation requirements.

Brief Description: Creating multiple measures to meet high school graduation requirements.

Sponsors: Senators Hobbs, McAuliffe, Hargrove, Swecker, Pridemore, Rasmussen and Marr.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/21/08.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: Beginning with the graduating class of 2008, students have two ways to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA) and graduate from high school: (1) meet the state standard on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading, writing, and mathematics; or (2) meet the state standard on a legislatively approved alternative assessment. Alternative assessments are required to be comparable in rigor to the skills and knowledge that the student must demonstrate on the WASL for each content area. Students must take the WASL at least once prior to taking an approved alternative assessment. Three alternative assessments have received legislative approval:

- The Grade Point Average (GPA)/WASL Cohort Comparison: A student's grades in math or English/language arts classes are compared with the grades of students with the same classes and who passed the WASL. This option is only available to students in 12th grade with an overall cumulative GPA of at least 3.2 on a 4.0 grading scale.
- The Collection of Evidence (COE): A student compiles classroom work samples developed under a teacher's supervision. Each student collection is scored at the state level by a panel of educators selected and trained by the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI).
- PSAT/SAT/ACT/Advance Placement Exams: A student earns scores at or above a state-designated level on specified PSAT, SAT, ACT, and Advance Placement exams.

Until 2013, students may also graduate from high school without a CAA if they meet the state standard in reading and writing on the WASL or one of the approved alternatives, and continue to earn mathematics credits and take the WASL until they graduate or meet the state standard.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Beginning with the graduating class of 2008, students in special education who are not appropriately assessed by the WASL, even with accommodations, may earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement (CIA) by passing a WASL at a level 2 or by submitting a portfolio of their work.

Summary of Bill: An additional way is created for students to graduate from high school without achieving a CAA or CIA. Beginning with the class of 2009, students can choose to complete five components:

- obtain a GPA in courses required by the State Board of Education (SBE) for high school graduation;
- obtain a GPA in courses required by the school district for high school graduation;
- complete a High School and Beyond Plan;
- complete a culminating project; or
- obtain a score on the WASL or an approved alternative assessment.

Each of the five components will be evaluated using a four-point grading system and assigned a different percentage of weight to determine the student's weighted graduation score. The SBE must establish the weighted score necessary to graduate. Additionally, the SBE will establish guidelines for school regarding how to establish the point values to be assigned to each of the five components and how to calculate the weighted graduation score. The guidelines must include that students must attain a minimum of a passing grade in each of the courses required by the state or the school district, and students must take the WASL at least once.

The two GPA components, in total, have a 40 percent weight on a 100 percent scale. A student's score on the WASL or an alternative has a 40 percent weight on a 100 percent scale. The completion of the High School and Beyond Plan and the culminating project each have a 10 percent weight on a 100 percent scale.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The WASL has caused schools to focus on college-bound kids to the exclusion of everything else. It is degrading the arts and career and technical programs that may not lead to college. We are denying some students their dream. Standards are important but so is everything else. The WASL is not eliminated under this bill. We are still asking the students to take the test but also to produce because that is what people do in life. The methods of measuring and assessing students should be as varied as the students that we have. If the WASL must be kept it should be only one of the measures used. A single test should not be used as a barrier. We believe in high standards and a simple assessment system. Grade point average is the best predictor of whether a student will be successful after high school.

CON: Multiple measures are almost useless without fundamental changes in instruction and the system as a whole. Alternative assessments and multiple measures make little difference in student outcomes. This is particularly true for many African-American students and other

students who are struggling. It is time to get serious about the short-comings of the system. Stop tinkering with the indicators that the system is failing too many of our students. Our students need the skills and knowledge to be prepared for life. There is no scientific validity to the weight given to the requirements and no guarantee that the weights will not change. Instead we should use methods that have been proven to be successful, like providing well-trained teachers and smaller class sizes. The WASL should be delinked from the graduation requirements. This bill will lead to a second class diploma for students in career and technical education, which is just the opposite from the direction that career and technical education should go.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Steve Hobbs, prime sponsor; Rachel DeBellis, Parent Empowerment Network & Mothers Against the Washington Assessment of Student Learning; Rich Semler, Superintendent, Richland School District; Kim Howard, Parent Teacher Association.

CON: Thelma Jackson, Black Education Strategy Roundtable; Mona H. Bailey, Black Education Strategy Roundtable; Wendy Rader-Konofalski, Washington Education Association; Arcella Hall, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; George Scarola, League of Education Voters; Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals.